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NSC BRIEFING 19 January 1955

OFFSHORE ISLANDS

I. ChiComs expected to follow capture Ichiang (18 Jan) with further assaults on Tachen group.

A. Smaller outlying islands of Tachens command--Yushan (northeast), Pishan and Nanchishan (southwest)--are in immediate danger. These held by total 2,500 regulars (all on Nanchishan) and 3,150 guerrillas.

B. Assaults on two strongest islands in group--Upper and Lower Tachen, garrisoned by 10,000 regulars and 2,750 guerrillas--also possible at any time.

C. Communists may also renew operations against Quemoy, to south.

State Dept., PACOM reviews completed

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

25X1

3. Nationalists, aware that ChiComs capable taking any or all offshore islands in face exclusively ChiNat opposition, may be considering evacuation of garrisons, beginning with Tachens.

At Ichiang, a regiment and two battalions of ChiCom troops (about 4,500), with air and sea support, landed at 1435 (0135 Washington time) on 18 Jan. Ichiang (garrisoned by 1,000 Chi Nat guerrillas) apparently captured less than two hours later.

4. Landings followed morning air attacks (at least 60 sorties) on Ichiang and main Tachens by Chi Com fighters, bombers. After air strikes, ChiCom artillery on Toumen ~~Shachan~~ Ichiang, fired 10,000 rounds at started "intense fires" (according to MAAG), apparently softened garrison before assault.

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

B. Full extent Tachen losses due air raids (18-19 Jan) not yet known, but believed hard hit. [redacted] 25X1

[redacted] 25X1

[redacted] ChiNats say 70 tons supplies (Xmas gift from American relief societies) destroyed. Nationalist air force weather and radio range station destroyed. Several other buildings flattened. 25X1

C. Ichiang landing force used four LSM, 8 LCI, plus 50 junks. Apparently came from Toumen Island (five mi. north), supported by two frigates and about 25 gunboats, patrol craft. Fighters and bombers dropped 500 bombs, strafed island prior to attack.

[redacted] 25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

25X1

D. Landings hit north, west coast of North Ichiang, western side South Ichiang at 1435 (their time). Communications with Tachens HQ cut five minutes later. Peiping announced invasion begun at 1400, Ichiang "liberated" at 1600. Tachen command "wrote off" Ichiang at 1700.

E. Invasion remarkable for speed accomplishment. Ichiang coastal terrain is steep, cliffs rocky; operation must have been essentially scaling effort. MAAG says attack "excellently coordinated and carried out."

F. With capture, ChiComs can mount artillery against main Tachens (7-1/2 mi.). Using 100mm or 122mm guns, Comms could hit both Tachens and harbor between; with 105mmguns, could hit Upper Tachen and harbor.

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Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

III. Attack on Ichiang came almost without warning.

[redacted]

B. On morning of 18th, MAAG reported air raids, noted clear weather, said Communist ships active in area. However, saw "no indications of amphibious attack."

C. Effectiveness of ChiCom planning and security applies to future operations against other Nationalist-held islands. Any or all could be similarly hit with little or no warning.

IV. Situation now ripe for ChiCom invasion other Tachens.

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

A. ChiComs shelling Pishan (35 mi. SW), MAAG reports "many ChiCom ships" near by. Held by 1,500 Nationalist guerrillas, Pishan could not withstand an attack similar to that made on Ichiang.

B. MAAG also reports ChiCom boat concentrations near Yushan (35 mi. NE), has suggested this island may soon come under attack.

C. Communist artillery on Chikushan, (9 mi. SW main Tachens) reported by MAAG to have shelled Tachens on 19 Jan.

D. With heavy ChiCom air attacks continuing, with ChiCom naval forces operating unchallenged in area, and with more than enough ChiCom troops available to overwhelm Tachens, assaults could come at any time.

ChiNat defense ministry believes ChiComs will soon reintensify operations near Quemoys to divert Nationalist naval forces from Tachen area.

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

25X1

VI. Nationalists risking further losses of major naval vessels by sending two destroyers, three DE's to Tachens.

A. This is brave last-resort measure to break up possible Communist invasion fleets, and might be of some help.

B. However, Communists have air superiority in area and Nationalist ships will be vulnerable to air action during daylight hours. Two of destroyers already reported under air attack near Tachens on morning of 20th [their time].

C. Ships might also be hit by Communist torpedo boats, which have twice sunk major Nat vessels.

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Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

VII. Situation of Nationalist garrison Tachens bleak.

A. [redacted]

Planned level of supplies not reached. Critical items are meats, cooking oils, some types of ammunition.

B. Communist bombing and shelling of Tachen harbor could make it unusable for further supply operations.

C. [redacted] morale of entire garrison probably low now.

D. Might collapse if ChiComs make large-scale landing, [redacted]

VIII. Chiang Kai-shek may be considering withdrawal of Tachens garrison.

A. However, time for effective evacuation of garrison may have passed. Unless US forces were to cover evacuation Communists could make [redacted]

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Loss of Tachens would be blow to morale on Formosa, even though islands have little military importance.

A. Taipei press reports of Formosa "invasion jitters" after 18 Jan attack.

B. Subsequently, expressions of disappointment and vexation at indications US 7th Fleet will not protect Tachens or other offshore islands.

C. Further Communist successes will increase Nationalists' vulnerability to Communist propaganda inciting defection.

Loss of Tachens would also mean serious decline in Nationalist prestige, some decline in US prestige, among friendly governments in Far East and among Overseas Chinese.

A. Some of Asian "neutrals" which recognize Peiping would be glad to see, or indifferent about, Communist capture of Tachens.

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

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B. However, South Korea, Philippines Thailand, free states of Indochina, and to lesser extent Japan, would all be concerned over Communist gains, might wonder how far they could count on US support in emergency.

XI. Nationalist Retaliation

Taipei press reports Nationalist planes have retaliated for Ichiang attack with "massive" air raids on Communist shipping along China coast, from Swatow to Tachens. Taipei claims, not yet confirmed, say 17 Communist ships destroyed, dive others damaged as of 20 Jan.

B. Press alos reports Nationalist guns on Quemoys opened up with heavy shelling of nearby Communist positions 19 January. Expect this to touch off renewed Communist shelling of the [redacted]

Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

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Approved For Release 2006/03/17 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000500010010-0

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C. Nationalist defense minister told US Ambassador Rankin 19 January he expects "chain of mutual retaliation and consequent expansion of war."

D. Defense minister says "only chance" of stopping spread of conflict would be 7th Fleet air support in Tachen area. Ambassador Rankin recommends "sympathetic consideration" of this request, or, alternatively, that US advise Nationalists to evacuate Tachens.

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